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THE ARTICULATION OF THE CONCEPTS OF NORMAL AND ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY¹

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That abnormal psychology bears the same relation to normal that pathology bears to physiology, that the fundamental concepts of psychology and psychopathology are identical, would seem to be a truism; and yet the reader of ordinary psychological literature turning to some of the recent works on mental pathology—as from a file of *The Psychological Review* to some late issue of *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology*—cannot fail to be impressed by the differences in terminology and point of view between these two branches of our general science as they stand today. Above all, the doctrine of the complex, which so permeates contemporary discussions of mental disorders, finds no place at all in treatises on the normal mental processes, so that the student who takes his elementary course in psychology in the college, and later enters upon the study of the abnormal mind, finds it necessary to learn the foundations of the science all over again, instead of naturally pressing on, as he would do in any other science, from already established rudiments to a more advanced and specialized study based on those same rudiments. And yet, as a matter of fact, if the doctrine is true at all it is first a theory of the *mind* before it is a theory of the *diseased* mind; and, further, its very value for abnormal psychology consists in its capacity to explain mental disorders as due to the perverted functioning of the same complexes which in their normal functioning constitute the healthy mind. A complete understanding of mental disorders, therefore, involves an understanding of the complex as a normal factor in mental life—that is to say, involves the study of the normal mind as an integration of complexes.

Mind as the psychologist views it is defined structurally as a sum-total of contents, dynamically as a sum-total of processes. The individual contents or processes we find almost universally classified under three heads—cognitive, affective, and conative, to use the terms now most in favor; the distinctive feature of cognition consisting in its reference to an object, of in affection its ascription to that object of a

¹ Read in part before the American Psychological Association at the New Haven meeting, Dec. 31, 1913.

value for the self, and of conation in its tendency to motor expression. All psychologists agree that there is no rigid division between these three groups, but that all three aspects are discoverable in every moment of consciousness and in every content of such a moment, though one of the three will in every case predominate. Analysis reveals also that all mental contents are complexes of elements, and that no mental element ever occurs alone. In other words, the unit of mental life is not the mental element, nor a complex of mental elements of one kind, but a complex possessing at one time a cognitive basis, an affective value, and a conative trend—in a word, the unit of mental life is just *The Complex*, in the Freudian sense of that term.

The psychological problem generated by this doctrine is threefold—structural, genetic, and dynamic. The structural analysis of the complex reveals but two constituent factors—cognitive and affective: conation is not a structural factor, but the dynamic aspect of the complex, that phase of it which expresses the fact that the complex is no dead thing, but an active force seeking outward expression in the physical world through the medium of motor activity. The cognitive factor is itself complex, consisting of a group of associated ideas, each idea in turn being composed of a number of elements: as contrasted with this there can be but one affective element, or, at least, only one of each dimension of affective elements—pleasant or unpleasant, exciting or quieting, etc. Thus the complete structural analysis of the complex reduces it finally to a group of cognitive elements combined into ideas, *plus* the single “affect,” as may be symbolized in the following diagram:—

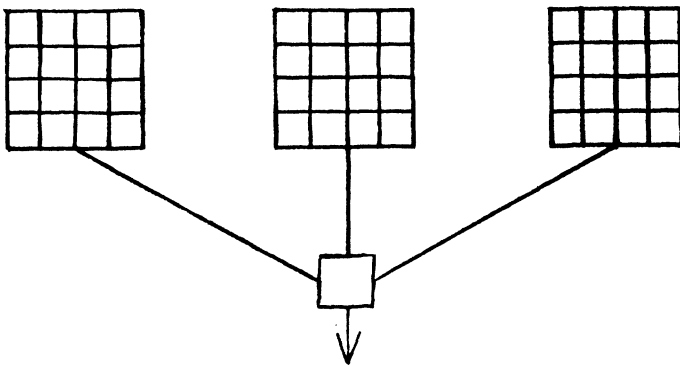


FIG. 1—Structural Analysis of the Complex

Here the three squares with their subdivisions represent the associated ideas with their constituent elements, the lower small undivided square the single affect, and the arrow the conative trend of the complex.

In this treatment of the complex we have a common meeting-ground for structuralist and functionalist. The structuralist is primarily interested in the analysis of mental contents, and this analysis is always into two groups of elements—cognitive and affective. The problem of whether there are one or more sub-groups of cognitive elements—whether one or more pairs of affective elements—is a secondary problem whose solution one way or another does not affect our general program. In any case the structuralist recognizes that volitional contents do not introduce any new element, but that will, like feeling and the different forms of knowledge, is constituted solely of cognitive and affective elements.

The functionalist, on the other hand, is primarily interested in the dynamic value of the mental processes, in conation rather than cognition and affection. To him knowledge and feeling are not so much contents of mind as processes expressing themselves in action, as media between stimulus and reaction having for their chief purpose the controlling of the adjustments between the organism and its environment. There is no conflict, then, between structuralist and functionalist, but merely a difference in the emphasis each lays on one or another phase of mental life, and the doctrine of the complex is first of all of value in its articulation of these two points of view.

Heretofore our treatment has been histological—from the complex to its elements: we pass now in the other direction from the individual complex to the complete personality. If a group of ideas with their affect are integrated in the complex, it is natural to think of these complexes as again integrated into systems, these into systems of a higher order, and so forth, the final integration of all the systems constituting what we know as the personality. Personality, then, is an integration of systems of complexes, and in the completely normal personality the various complexes and systems will be so interrelated that it is possible to pass smoothly and easily from one to another. This is represented in Fig. 2 (see p. 286).

On its genetic side it is the task of psychology to trace (1) the development of the complex out of the mass of cognitive and affective elements—the “complication” of old and new cognitive elements in the idea, of each idea with its group of

associated ideas, and of all these with their appropriate affect; and (2) the growth of the personality by the accretion of new complexes. Finally, in its dynamic aspect, as we have seen, psychology studies the conative tendencies and efficient activities of the complex, with particular reference to the value of these conative tendencies for the personality as a whole—whether in furtherance of the personal integration or in conflict with it.

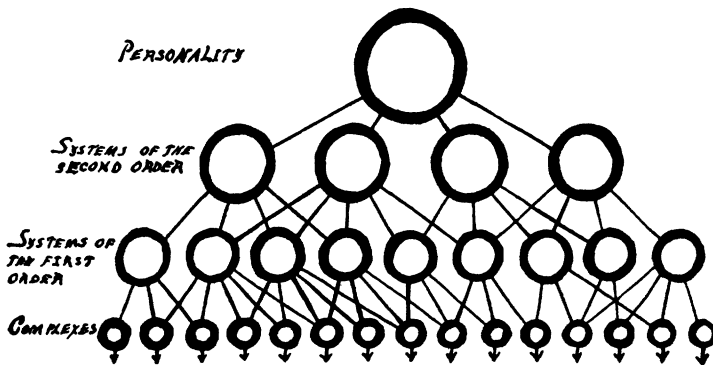


FIG. 2—Structural Analysis of Normal Personality

On the foundation of these two concepts, therefore, of the Complex, and Personality as an integration of complexes, a complete science of psychology may be built up, and the present unfortunate hiatus between normal and abnormal, and structural and functional, psychology happily bridged. Let the student be introduced early in his introductory course to the notion of the complex, and he will not be obliged to relearn the rudiments, or rather to learn an entirely new alphabet, of the science when he considers it later on in its pathological aspect. If in addition the psychopathologist can be prevailed upon to give back to the normal psychologist the stolen concept "Psychosis," allowing it to signify *any* temporary status of the personality, still more can be done in the direction of articulation.

In the execution of this eirenic program normal psychology will properly claim for its province the study of the general nature and internal constitution of complexes, psychoses, and personalities, of the processes of complication and conservation, and of all complex-activities which further the personal integration. I do not say that the average undergraduate student is fitted to enter at once upon the study of all these phenomena, but only that his introduction to the science should

be such that he may afterwards enter easily upon the more advanced treatment without a feeling that he is studying an entirely new science, as is certainly the case under our present system. Finally, the field of normal psychology being thus delimited, it falls to the psychopathologist to discuss such disturbing processes as conflict, repression, and dissociation. The normal condition is symbolized in Fig. 2, in which every complex and system is connected continuously with every other, and the conative tendencies of all, as represented by the arrows, are harmonious, or in fulfillment of the personal integration. In contrast to this, a morbid condition would be represented on its structural side by a group of complexes not connected with the rest of the personality, and in its dynamic aspect by differently pointed arrows, thus :—

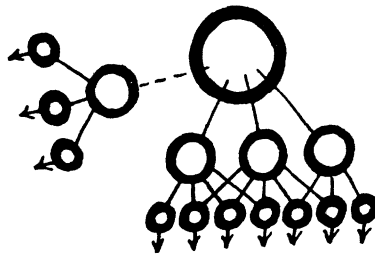


FIG. 3—Analysis of a Psychopathic Personality